

Claims

1. A data communication method for use in a telephone network having a caller-identification feature, wherein the caller-identification feature communicates data to a called party that includes data corresponding to a telephone number of a calling party, the method comprising:

identifying a message recipient having a message recipient telephone number on the telephone network;

selecting a message for the message recipient;

providing a message code corresponding to the selected message, wherein the message code is in the format of a telephone number;

setting up a non-associated telephone call to the recipient telephone number from a simulated calling party having the same telephone number as the message code, such that the telephone network uses the caller-identification feature to communicate data corresponding to the message code to the recipient telephone number;

receiving the data corresponding to the message code at the recipient telephone number.

2. The method of claim 1 further comprising the step of converting the received data corresponding to the message code.

3. The method of claim 2 wherein the received data corresponding to the message code is converted to the message for the message recipient.

4. The method of claim 3 further comprising the step of displaying the message as text.

5. The method of claim 3 further comprising the step of audibly announcing the message.

6. The method of claim 5 wherein the message is audibly announced over a speaker other than a speaker in a telephone handset.

7. The method of claim 5 wherein the message is audibly announced over a speaker in a telephone handset.

8. The method of claim 7 wherein the telephone handset is corded.

9. The method of claim 7 wherein the telephone handset is cordless.

10. The method of claim 1 wherein the telephone network is the North American telephone network.

11. The method of claim 10 wherein the caller-identification feature is Caller ID.

12. The method of claim 11 wherein the data communicated to a called party by the Caller ID feature is the Incoming Caller Line Identification (ICLID) signal.

13. The method of claim 10 wherein the format of the telephone number includes a three-digit area code and a seven-digit number.

14. The method of claim 10 wherein the message code is a ten-digit number.

15. The method of claim 1 wherein the caller-identification feature communicates data on a common channel interoffice signaling system.

16. The method of claim 15 wherein the caller-identification feature communicates data on the signaling system 7 (SS7) common channel interoffice signaling system.

17. The method of claim 1 further comprising the step of identifying plural message recipients, each having a respective message recipient telephone number.

18. The method of claim 17 wherein the recipients are identified on the basis of geographical location.

19. The method of claim 17 wherein the same message is selected for each of the plural recipients.

20. The method of claim 19 wherein the message is an emergency notification message.

21. The method of claim 1 further comprising the step of causing a telephone associated with the message recipient telephone number to provide a distinctive ring when data corresponding to a message code is received at the recipient telephone number.

22. The method of claim 1 wherein the message is an emergency notification message.